

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN
SOUTHERN DIVISION

CALEB LEWIS,

Petitioner,

Case No. 1:07-cv-772

v.

Honorable Robert Holmes Bell

CINDI S. CURTIN,

Respondent.

_____ /

OPINION

This is a habeas corpus action brought by a state prisoner pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2254. Promptly after the filing of a petition for habeas corpus, the Court must undertake a preliminary review of the petition to determine whether “it plainly appears from the face of the petition and any exhibits annexed to it that the petitioner is not entitled to relief in the district court.” Rule 4, RULES GOVERNING § 2254 CASES; *see* 28 U.S.C. § 2243. If so, the petition must be summarily dismissed. Rule 4; *see Allen v. Perini*, 424 F.2d 134, 141 (6th Cir. 1970) (district court has the duty to “screen out” petitions that lack merit on their face). A dismissal under Rule 4 includes those petitions which raise legally frivolous claims, as well as those containing factual allegations that are palpably incredible or false. *Carson v. Burke*, 178 F.3d 434, 436-37 (6th Cir. 1999). After undertaking the review required by Rule 4, the Court concludes that Petitioner has failed to exhaust his available state-court remedies as to all claims raised in the petition. Because Petitioner has fewer than 60 days remaining in the limitations period for filing a habeas petition, the Court will not dismiss the action at this time, pending Petitioner’s compliance with the further directions of this Court set forth in this opinion and attached order.

Discussion

I. Factual allegations

Petitioner Caleb Lewis presently is incarcerated with the Michigan Department of Corrections and housed at the Oaks Correctional Facility (ECF). He was convicted by an Ingham County jury on May 13, 2004, on two counts of assault with intent to rob while armed, MICH. COMP. LAWS § 750.89, two counts of armed robbery, MICH. COMP. LAWS § 750.529, and one count of possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony, MICH. COMP. LAWS § 750.227b(a). He was sentenced on June 30, 2004, to four concurrent terms of 18 to 50 years and one consecutive term of two years.

Petitioner appealed his conviction and sentence to the Michigan Court of Appeals on July 23, 2004. According to the amended petition, Petitioner's first claim on appeal was that insufficient evidence existed to support conviction on all charges.¹ Second, he argued that the trial court erred in allowing the prosecution to introduce through a police officer evidence of accomplice's statement that implicated Petitioner.² Third, Petitioner argued that the trial court improperly scored his offense under the sentencing guidelines. Fourth, Petitioner contended that his sentence was imposed in violation of *Blakely v. Washington*, 542 U.S. 296 (2004). The court of appeals affirmed. According to the attachments to the complaint, Petitioner also apparently sought leave to file a supplemental brief, which was denied by the court of appeals on December 1, 2005.

¹The court of appeals failed to address this issue in its opinion.

²The court concluded that admission of the accomplice's statement violated Petitioner's rights under the Confrontation Clause. However, the court held that the error was harmless beyond a reasonable doubt.

Petitioner filed a *pro per* application for leave to appeal to the Michigan Supreme Court. In his application, Petitioner raised only the Confrontation Clause and *Blakely* claims, in addition to a new issue: whether the prosecutor knowingly placed witnesses on the stand whose testimony was perjured. The Supreme Court denied leave to appeal on August 29, 2006.

In his petition for writ of habeas corpus, Petitioner raises the following claims: (1) sufficiency of the evidence; (2) violation of the Confrontation Clause; (3) violation of the Eighth Amendment by imposition of a sentence that was not supported by sufficient evidence; and (4) error in scoring offense variables under the sentencing guidelines.

II. Failure to exhaust available state-court remedies

Before the Court may grant habeas relief to a state prisoner, the prisoner must exhaust remedies available in the state courts. 28 U.S.C. § 2254(b)(1); *O'Sullivan v. Boerckel*, 526 U.S. 838, 842 (1999). Exhaustion requires a petitioner to “fairly present” federal claims so that state courts have a “fair opportunity” to apply controlling legal principles to the facts bearing upon a petitioner’s constitutional claim. *See O'Sullivan*, 526 U.S. at 842; *Picard v. Connor*, 404 U.S. 270, 275-77 (1971), *cited in Duncan v. Henry*, 513 U.S. 364, 365 (1995), and *Anderson v. Harless*, 459 U.S. 4, 6 (1982). To fulfill the exhaustion requirement, a petitioner must have fairly presented his federal claims to all levels of the state appellate system, including the state’s highest court. *Duncan*, 513 U.S. at 365-66; *Silverburg v. Evitts*, 993 F.2d 124, 126 (6th Cir. 1993); *Hafley v. Sowders*, 902 F.2d 480, 483 (6th Cir. 1990). “[S]tate prisoners must give the state courts one full opportunity to resolve any constitutional issues by invoking one complete round of the State’s established appellate review process.” *O'Sullivan*, 526 U.S. at 845. The district court can and must raise the exhaustion issue

sua sponte, when it clearly appears that habeas claims have not been presented to the state courts. *See Prather v. Rees*, 822 F.2d 1418, 1422 (6th Cir. 1987); *Allen*, 424 F.2d at 138-39.

Petitioner bears the burden of showing exhaustion. *See Rust v. Zent*, 17 F.3d 155, 160 (6th Cir. 1994). According to the allegations of the complaint and the attachments provided by Petitioner, it appears that Petitioner failed to fully exhaust his sufficiency-of-the-evidence claim. Although Petitioner asserts that he raised the claim in the Michigan Court of Appeals, the court of appeals did not address the claim and Petitioner's application for leave to appeal to the Michigan Supreme Court (Am. Compl., Att. 1, docket #4) does not include the claim. Accordingly, the claim has never been fairly presented to the state's highest court. *Duncan*, 513 U.S. at 365-66. Moreover, Petitioner's Eighth Amendment claim has never been presented to the Michigan appellate courts.

An applicant has not exhausted available state remedies if he has the right under state law to raise, by any available procedure, the question presented. 28 U.S.C. § 2254(c). Petitioner has at least one available procedure by which to raise the unexhausted issues he has presented in this application. He may file a motion for relief from judgment under M.C.R. 6.500 *et. seq.* Under Michigan law, one such motion may be filed after August 1, 1995. M.C.R. 6.502(G)(1). Petitioner has not yet filed his one allotted motion. Therefore, the Court concludes that he has at least one available state remedy.

Because Petitioner has some claims that are exhausted and some that are not, his petition is "mixed." Under *Rose v. Lundy*, 455 U.S. 509, 22 (1982), district courts are directed to dismiss mixed petitions without prejudice in order to allow petitioners to return to state court to exhaust remedies. Since the AEDPA was amended to impose a one-year statute of limitations on habeas claims, however, dismissal without prejudice often effectively precludes future federal

habeas review. This is particularly true after the Supreme Court's holding in *Duncan v. Walker*, 533 U.S. 167, 181-82 (2001), that the limitations period is not tolled during the pendency of a federal habeas petition. As a result, the Sixth Circuit adopted a stay-and-abeyance procedure to be applied to mixed petitions. In *Palmer v. Carlton*, 276 F.3d 777, 781 (6th Cir. 2002), the Sixth Circuit held that when the dismissal of a mixed petition could jeopardize the timeliness of a subsequent petition, the district court should dismiss only the unexhausted claims and stay further proceedings on the remaining portion until the petitioner has exhausted his claims in the state court. *See also Griffin v. Rogers*, 308 F.3d 647, 652 n.1 (6th Cir. 2002).

Petitioner's application is subject to the one-year statute of limitations provided in 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(1). Under § 2244(d)(1)(A), the one-year limitation period runs from "the date on which the judgment became final by the conclusion of direct review or the expiration of the time for seeking such review." Petitioner appealed his conviction to the Michigan Court of Appeals and Michigan Supreme Court. The Michigan Supreme Court denied his application on August 29, 2006. Petitioner did not petition for certiorari to the United States Supreme Court, though the ninety-day period in which he could have sought review in the United States Supreme Court is counted under § 2244(d)(1)(A). *See Bronaugh v. Ohio*, 235 F.3d 280, 283 (6th Cir. 2000). The ninety-day period expired on Monday, November 27, 2006. Accordingly, Petitioner has one year, until November 27, 2007, in which to file his habeas petition. Petitioner filed his original petition on August 9, 2007, and his amended petition on October 16, 2007.

The *Palmer* Court has indicated that thirty days is a reasonable amount of time for a petitioner to file a motion for post-conviction relief in state court, and another thirty days is a reasonable amount of time for a petitioner to return to federal court after he has exhausted his state-

court remedies. *Palmer*, 276 F.3d at 721. *See also Griffin*, 308 F.3d at 653 (holding that sixty days amounts to mandatory period of equitable tolling under *Palmer*).³ In the instant case, Petitioner has less than sixty days remaining before the statute of limitations expires. Petitioner therefore would not have the necessary 30 days to file a motion for post-conviction relief or the additional 30 days to return to this court before expiration of the statute of limitations. As a result, were the Court to dismiss the petition without prejudice for lack of exhaustion, the dismissal could jeopardize the timeliness of any subsequent petition. *Palmer* 276 F.3d at 781.

The Supreme Court recently held, however, that the type of stay-and-abeyance procedure set forth in *Palmer* should be available only in limited circumstances because over-expansive use of the procedure would thwart the AEDPA's goals of achieving finality and encouraging petitioners to first exhaust all of their claims in the state courts. *See Rhines v. Weber*, 125 S. Ct. 1528, 1534-35 (2005). In its discretion, a district court contemplating stay and abeyance should stay the mixed petition pending prompt exhaustion of state remedies if there is "good cause" for the petitioner's failure to exhaust, if the petitioner's unexhausted claims are not "plainly meritless" and if there is no indication that the petitioner engaged in "intentionally dilatory litigation tactics." *Id.* at 1535. Under *Rhines*, if the district court determines that a stay is inappropriate, the district court must allow the petitioner to delete the unexhausted claims from his petition, especially in circumstances in which dismissal of the entire petition without prejudice would "unreasonably impair the petitioner's right to obtain federal relief." *Id.*

Consequently, if Petitioner wishes to pursue his unexhausted claims in the state

³The running of the statute of limitations is tolled when "a properly filed application for State post-conviction or other collateral review with respect to the pertinent judgment or claim is pending." 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(2).

courts, he must show cause within thirty days why he is entitled to a stay of these proceedings. Specifically, Petitioner must show: (1) good cause for the his failure to exhaust before filing his habeas petition; (2) that his unexhausted claims are not plainly meritless; and (3) that he has not engaged in intentionally dilatory litigation tactics. *See Rhines*, 125 S. Ct. at 1535. If Petitioner fails to meet the *Rhines* requirements for a stay or fails to timely comply with the Court's order, the Court will review only his exhausted claims.

In the alternative, Petitioner may file an amended petition setting forth only his exhausted claims.

An Order consistent with this Opinion will be entered.

Date: November 8, 2007 /s/ Robert Holmes Bell
ROBERT HOLMES BELL
CHIEF UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE